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# Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 014**

Monday, June 1, 2020

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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota





## Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Monday, June 1, 2020

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 14th meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[*English*]

This will be a hybrid meeting. Some members will be participating via video conference and some will be participating in person.

In order to ensure that those joining the meeting via video conference can be seen and heard by those in the chamber, two screens have been set up on either side of the Speaker's chair, and members in the chamber can listen to the floor audio or to interpretation using their earpiece at their desk.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, and please direct your remarks through the chair.

[*English*]

For those joining via video conference, I would like to remind you to leave your mike on mute when you are not speaking.

Also, please note that if you want to speak in English, you should be on the English channel. If you want to speak French, you should be on the French channel. Should you wish to alternate between the two languages, you should change the channel to the language that you are speaking each time you switch languages.

[*Translation*]

Should members participating by video conference need to request the floor outside their designated speaking times, they should activate their mic and state that they have a point of order. Those in the Chamber can rise in the usual way.

Please note that today's proceedings will be televised in the same way as a typical sitting of the House.

[*English*]

We'll now proceed to ministerial announcements.

I understand that there are none.

Now we'll proceed to the tabling of documents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. LeBlanc has a document he wants to table.

Go ahead, Mr. LeBlanc.

[*English*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Chair, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a report entitled "Democracy Matters, Debates Count: A report on the 2019 Leaders' Debates Commission and the future of debates in Canada".

Mr. Chair, on behalf of all of us, I want to thank the Right Honourable David Johnston for his continued service.

**The Chair:** Good.

We'll now proceed to the presenting of petitions, for a period not exceeding 15 minutes.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind members that any petition presented during a meeting of the special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions.

[*English*]

For members participating in person, we ask that you please come to the front and drop off your certificate at the table once the petition has been presented.

In presenting petitions, the first presenter today is Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to be presenting a petition in support of Bill S-204. This is a bill in the Senate, put forward by Senator Salma Ataullahjan.

It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ for which there has not been consent by the donor. It also creates a mechanism by which someone could be deemed inadmissible to Canada if they were involved in organ harvesting and trafficking.

This bill is designed to confront and address the horrific practice by which, in certain cases—for instance, inside China—minority communities or dissidents may be targeted and have their organs removed as they're killed and used for transplantation.

Petitioners are supportive of Bill S-204, and they want to see it passed as soon as possible.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Our next petition will go to Mr. Viersen.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I am presenting a petition today signed by Canadians who are concerned that Bill C-7 removes safeguards from the current euthanasia regime, including the mandatory 10-day waiting period.

Mr. Chair, these people who are signing this petition would like to see an improvement in assisted living, not assisted dying.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Ms. Zahid.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to present an e-petition signed by over 40 people. It asks that the Government of Canada recognize the Republic of Somaliland as an autonomous state that may result in foreign investments, direct access of development aid, foreign aid for disaster relief and infrastructure development investment loans.

**The Chair:** Now we'll proceed to Statements by Members for a period not exceeding 15 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Each statement will be for a maximum of one minute. I remind members that if they exceed that time limit, they will be interrupted.

[*English*]

Our first statement goes to Monsieur El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I thank the government for the way it has managed this global crisis and its impact on Canadians. It has acted in a robust, rapid and very effective way.

Our Prime Minister has been awarded the medal of honour, courage and humanity worldwide. Canada is one of the few countries that has acted in the best interests of its citizens and maintained their dignity in these uncertain times.

[*English*]

While addressing Canadians, our right honourable Prime Minister showed us leadership, the importance of transparency, and integrity. He kept us united. His top priority was saving lives, along with finding realistic solutions regarding the economic impact on our daily life. Because of his outstanding leadership, we're admired across the world, which is another distinguished privilege of being Canadian.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** COVID-19 has emptied food banks across Canada, even in an agricultural community like Chatham-Kent, so Wes Thompson and James Rasmussen, along with Alysson Storey, Randi Bokor, Maureen Geddes, Chris and Terry Johnston, Jason King, Fannie Vavoulis and Brent Wilken, grew an idea into the community's largest-ever food drive.

Project manager Moréna McDonald estimates that over 3,000 volunteers ended up helping in the May 16 Miracle. Residents put

non-perishable foodstuffs on their doorsteps, with drop-off centres organized for rural areas. Volunteer groups travelled predetermined routes while maintaining physical distancing.

The community collected an amazing 678,000 pounds of food. They accidentally exceeded by over 20% the record in the *Guinness World Records* book for collected food in a single day. Chatham-Kent has restocked their food banks and reaffirmed their community pride. It's an honour to represent such a community.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Mr. Sarai.

We have a point of order from Mr. d'Entremont.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC):** As much as I like seeing my friends on the big screens, there are no big screens yet, so we don't know who's on and who's not on. I was wondering if there was going to be a TV coming up soon here, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** There is a technical issue, and it is being worked on. We're working on it as we go through. The other alternative is that we suspend until we fix it. If it's okay, we'll just continue. I think we can all hear the members who are speaking. This is one of the realities of a virtual or hybrid system.

Our next statement will go to Mr. Sarai.

● (1210)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and *mabuhay* to all the Filipino Canadians across this country.

In June across Canada we recognize Filipino Heritage Month to raise awareness and celebrate the Filipino community. Here in Surrey Centre, and across Canada, the Filipino community makes important contributions to our cities and has helped shape Canada into the vibrant multicultural society that we all know and love today.

Now more than ever, during these challenging times we must come together as Canadians to celebrate the rich heritage and history of our Filipino neighbours. Throughout June, please join me in celebrating our fellow citizens of Filipino descent by recognizing all the incredible ways in which they have contributed to making Canada a better place for all of us.

Happy Filipino Heritage Month.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Perron.

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

Today is World Milk Day, and I would like to recognize the exceptional work and dedication shown by everyone in the industry. They ensure we have a nutritious, high quality product every day.

Let's take part in the local consumption movement and rediscover the exceptional products of our dairy producers and processors. Enjoy the yogurts, cheeses and other products because it's true that milk is good.

I would also like to thank Bruno Letendre, outgoing chair of the Producteurs de lait du Québec, and I congratulate the new chair, Daniel Gobeil.

The dairy industry has been sacrificed several times in trade agreements. The government's broken promises are piling up. The payment of compensation is still uncertain. Action must be taken. The first step must be the direct allocation of import quotas to processors, and the second must be the full payment of the promised compensation. We demand a formal commitment from the government.

**The Chair:** We'll now continue with Mr. Iacono.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, June is Italian Heritage Month. The situation is special this year, since Italy has been hard hit by COVID-19, with more than 30,000 deaths.

Like me, many Italian Canadians still have family and friends in Italy, and the news has sometimes been very difficult to take, yet that has not detracted from the great co-operation that exists between Canada and Italy.

[English]

Today I would like to highlight the *solidarietà italiana* in our community. During the pandemic, Canadians of Italian descent have been united to support *anziani*, our *famiglie* and our *amici* in Italy by participating in the fundraising campaign COVID-19 *Aiuti-AMO l'Italia* to support the Italian Red Cross response activities.

I send a special salute to to my *cugino* Giuseppe, who is still on the road to recovery from COVID-19.

[Member spoke in Italian]

**The Chair:** We'll continue with Mr. Kram.

**Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I would like to acknowledge all of the organizations in Saskatchewan and across Canada that are working hard to help small businesses adapt to the challenges of the current pandemic.

In particular, I would like to thank the Regina Downtown Business Improvement District, or RDBID. As soon as the pandemic hit, RDBID launched a daily electronic newsletter to keep their members informed of support programs, local initiatives and local success stories. They have used their social media channels on a daily basis to promote takeout and delivery services, online and curbside services offered by restaurants and retailers. They have also launched a number of their own initiatives to help businesses access e-commerce. Through persistent communication and a lot of long hours, RDBID has helped businesses in downtown Regina to weather the storm. Because of their hard work, downtown Regina will come through this pandemic better than ever.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Lauzon now has the floor.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, high-speed Internet will be to the 21st century what electricity was to the 20th: an essential service.

We are currently experiencing a drastic change in our morals, our consumption patterns and our socialization habits. We are turning to the Internet to read the news, contact our friends and complete our purchases.

Isolation associated with COVID-19 has only accelerated this trend. Unfortunately, not all regions of Canada have reliable, affordable, high-speed access.

I would like to reassure the citizens of my riding about the efforts that we are making as a government, but also about the work I've been doing as a member of Parliament since 2015 to connect the 41 municipalities of Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

Aside from this essential service, our students, seniors, entrepreneurs and telework are very important to the regions. We have heard you, and I will continue to fight for you, so that you can have access to affordable high-speed Internet.

• (1215)

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll now go on to Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, a few days ago, we all watched with horror and outrage the death of an unarmed black man at the hands of the police in Minneapolis. For many of us, these images may seem shocking, but it's an all too familiar tale to millions of black people not only in the United States but also here in Canada, in my city of Gatineau and around the world, who must at times live with the scourge of anti-black racism.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I can't know what it's like to be black in our society.

What I do know, however, is that you and I, and everyone in this House, have the power and the responsibility to make our country more just.

[English]

Let us all recommit ourselves to that endeavour. Black Canadians and all those who have to endure racism and discrimination are watching us, and they expect more from us.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan is next.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Without a doubt, these past few months have been challenging, to say the least, from both a health and economic perspective, but, Mr. Chair, I have to say how proud I am of my community of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. We continue to successfully flatten the curve in our region and, just as importantly, we are making sure that we are here for each other, whether it is the Cornwall Optimists' GoFeedMe campaign, the Iroquois-Matilda Lions Club delivering groceries to those who are quarantined in their households or the local United Way, the Social Development Council or the Carefor seniors support centre co-leading an effort to deliver 1,500 baskets to seniors in need. There have been many examples of kindness and generosity from our community.

I rise today in the House of Commons to say thank you to my constituents and to all Canadians; to our essential front-line workers, our service clubs and our businesses that have stepped up to help out; and to everybody playing their part to get us through this challenge.

I couldn't be more proud of my community and my residents, and it is an honour to serve as their member of Parliament.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Ms. Yip.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, although Asian Heritage Month has just passed, we recognize the tremendous effort of all Asian Canadians on the front lines of this pandemic, as health care providers or as essential workers. I want to thank the many Asian organizations for donating to Scarborough—Agincourt's hospital, long-term care homes and food banks.

As a Canadian born and raised in Scarborough, I'm offended by the reports of violence and vandalism targeting Asian-Canadian communities across this country. In budget 2019 we invested \$45 million to launch a new anti-racism strategy, which included the establishment of the anti-racism secretariat, because these efforts are unfortunately clearly still needed.

As events continue to unfold in the United States, it is important to recognize that we have work to do here as well. Whether it is anti-black or anti-Asian, racism and discrimination of any kind have no place in Canada—full stop. Now more than ever, we must stand united in diversity.

**The Chair:** We'll now go on to Mr. Bragdon.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Over the last few months, Canadians throughout New Brunswick and across the country have stepped up to support their community. Health care workers, truckers, farmers, business owners, pharmacists, grocery store staff, faith-based and non-profit organizations and so many others have all answered the call to do their part.

Today, Mr. Chair, I would like to specifically highlight the work of those who support and take care of our seniors, who are among some of our most at-risk citizens. It has been said that the character of a nation and its people is revealed most in how they treat their most vulnerable. Our seniors have made immense contributions to our society. Many have put their lives on the line to protect Canada

and the democratic freedoms we enjoy as Canadians. They have worked hard and made many sacrifices throughout their lives to make Canada the greatest nation on earth. Taking care of our seniors is the right thing to do.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who are supporting and caring for our seniors. Whether they be long-term care staff, personal care workers, health care professionals, family members or volunteers, thank you for all you are doing in support of our seniors. Together we shall overcome.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Ms. Shin.

• (1220)

**Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Although we've come to the end of Asian Heritage Month, I'd like to acknowledge some unsung Chinese Canadian heroes who shed their blood as patriots for our nation. I commemorate the 6,500 Chinese Canadians of the 9,000 railway workers who helped build and unite Canada. I pay respect to the many Chinese Canadians who died while building the CP Railway on the most dangerous terrains in the B.C. segment. I honour the Chinese Canadians who served and died in World War II.

Sadly, Asian communities in Canada face racist incidents today. No one should be afraid of walking in their own neighbourhood. Adult children should not have to call their elderly parents to tell them to stay home because they might be attacked by racists. There's no justification for racial slurs, physical violence or vandalism against any individual or community.

I will continue to work together with other elected officials, the police and the RCMP to mitigate these issues toward justice and restoration.

**The Chair:** We'll go on to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Angus, please proceed.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Ten years ago today, Cree youth leader Shannen Koostachin was killed in a horrific car accident. She was only 15 years old, yet in her short life she became the voice of a generation of first nation youth who were no longer willing to put up with systemic discrimination.

Shannen had never seen a real school. Children in Attawapiskat were being educated in squalid conditions. Her fight for their dignity and rights launched the largest youth-driven civil rights movement in Canadian history. At 14 she was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize.

Shannen never lived to see the school that was built in her community, but her work carries on through the Shannen's Dream movement. She is a role model for youth activists across this country. A movie, two books and a statue are dedicated to her. She's been recognized as one of the 150 most influential women in Canadian history.

I had the honour to know Shannen. In fact, I think of her every single day. She truly did come from the angels, and one day she returned.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you now have the floor.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Mr. Chair, for months now, thousands of consumers who need money to pay their bills have been fighting against airlines and the government to have their rights respected: three class action suits, a unanimous motion by the National Assembly and over 30,000 signatures on a petition calling for reimbursement for cancelled flights. It isn't a whim to enforce the law.

Air Canada, which confiscated \$2.6 billion from its customers, received more than \$800 million from Ottawa without any conditions. Yet, the company has a year's worth of cash in reserve, \$6 billion in its coffers, and is in the process of raising more than \$1.4 billion in the financial markets. Air Canada has the means to reimburse citizens. It has the money it needs.

We're tired of the Minister of Transport's crocodile tears. I consulted the bankruptcy directory this morning and didn't see any airlines listed. Now is the time to work for the people.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rayes now has the floor.

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I want to pay tribute to a great man who represented the public here, in the House, for close to 15 years: Michel Gauthier.

Michel, in life, we meet a lot of people, but some of them leave their mark on us forever. From the first time I spoke with you two years ago, I immediately understood that I was talking with a man with heart, a passionate man, a man who had Quebec imprinted on his heart.

Because of your decision to join the Conservative Party of Canada, I got to know you personally, and I am most grateful. I will remember our discussions on the best ways to communicate our Conservative vision to Quebecers. I will remember our heated discussions on Quebec-Canada relations. I will remember all the passion and energy you had in the lead-up to a speech to our supporters.

Michel, Canadians, Quebecers and I will remember you forever, the great man you were, the outstanding speaker, a formidable parliamentarian, with integrity, passion, commitment and love for Quebec.

I offer my sincere condolences to Anne, and to your family and friends.

Rest in peace.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dubourg, you now have the floor.

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis resonated strongly within black communities in Canada and also in the heart of Montreal North.

At a time of pandemic uncertainty when members of our community find themselves on the front lines as essential workers, an event like this rekindles feelings of fear, powerlessness and injustice. It has happened once again in the United States, but we are not immune to such behaviour here, in Canada.

Dear constituents of Bourassa, I know our stories, I feel with you the pain as a parent and as a black person. I know this constant fear for our children.

As elected officials, we have the duty to protect your rights and to ensure harmony. We must be vigilant and work to deconstruct prejudice and discrimination.

● (1225)

**The Chair:** Before continuing, I'd like to give a reminder.

To avoid sound problems, members participating in person shouldn't connect to the video conference.

[*English*]

There seems to be some interference when you watch the video conference in the chamber and it's being transmitted, so let us make things run more smoothly.

[*Translation*]

We will now proceed to the questioning of ministers.

Please note that we will suspend the proceedings every 45 minutes in order to allow employees who provide support for the sitting to replace each other safely.

[*English*]

The first question goes to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Scheer.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

When the government first starting rolling out programs to help Canadians get through this pandemic, we raised points about some flaws and gaps in the program. The government assured Canadians that it would fix these programs as time went on. Well, Canadians are suffering through both the health and the economic consequences of the lockdown related to the coronavirus. Here we are the first day of June and the government still has yet to address the flaws in its programs; it is still letting so many Canadians down.

I have a series of very straightforward and specific questions.

On April 20 we raised with the Minister of Finance the issue of companies that had purchased another company not being able to demonstrate revenue loss, and therefore not being eligible for the wage subsidy, even though both companies separately would have been able to do just that. We have raised it several times now. I would like to ask the government when it will be fixing this unnecessarily rigid aspect of the wage subsidy program.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** Mr. Chair, I believe that a company with a fantastic Canadian history in the member's riding, Brandt Tractor, which pioneered the manufacturing of augers in Canada, is particularly affected by this. It is very important for us that the wage subsidy be available to as many Canadian companies as possible. It helps to keep employees connected to their businesses. Now, there are always some specific issues that can make it challenging for particular companies. I know that in the case of Brandt Tractor, for example, officials from the Ministry of Finance are directly in touch with the company to work on its issues.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Mr. Chair, that's the same answer we got last week. It's the same answer we got two weeks before that, and it's the same answer we have been getting from day one.

This is a very simple question. The government has indicated that it will change this program to allow for amalgamations. The solution is very simple. It is to also allow for those companies that have undergone acquisitions.

This is a very specific question: Will the government fix this program and allow for companies that have acquired another company to still access the wage subsidy program?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, let me just point out that the wage subsidy program is working extremely well for many, many Canadian companies and for many, many Canadians who are able to keep their jobs thanks to the program. More than two million Canadian workers are today benefiting from the wage subsidy program. By any measure that is a successful program.

Now, for sure there are always going to be companies which, because of specifics in their history, need specific attention, and that—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Mr. Scheer.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Mr. Chair, reports indicate that up to half of the money allocated for the wage subsidy is going unspent, precisely because this government has left in unnecessarily rigid barriers for companies to be able to access it.

It's a yes-or-no question, and the minister still can't answer it. Along the same lines, we asked on April 8 to allow businesses applying for the wage subsidy to demonstrate their 30% revenue loss using other metrics, such as loss of earnings, subscriptions and orders, in order to qualify. They still can't do that today, the first day of June.

Why hasn't the government addressed this part of the program?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, we are very proud of the wage subsidy program and proud of the role it is playing to keep Canadian businesses going and, crucially, to keep Canadian workers connected to their jobs, but I have a question for the member opposite.

Half of the questions we hear from the Conservatives in question period are concerns that we're spending too much money, that the deficit is too high. The other half of the time they complain about specific companies not getting access to our programs.

We know which side we're on as a government. I'd like the Conservatives to let Canadians know what they believe in.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Mr. Scheer, you may have a short question.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Mr. Chair, it's quite clear what Conservatives believe in. We believe that when times were good, this government should have paid down debt instead of wasting money like \$50 million to Mastercard and \$12 million to Loblaws.

The fact of the matter is that the government left Canadians in a vulnerable position as we were entering this pandemic precisely because of its fiscal irresponsibility, and now they have designed programs that have unnecessary barriers in them that prevent more and more Canadians from getting the help they need.

Again, on April 26, Conservatives asked the Prime Minister to change the criteria for the Canada emergency business account so that small businesses that don't happen to have a business bank account can qualify. Why hasn't the Prime Minister made that change either?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I'm really grateful for that question because it allows me to set the record straight for Canadians.

Canadians need to know that our country has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We had that before the crisis began, and we still do. Canada has the fiscal firepower to support Canadians during this unprecedented crisis, and that is what we are going to continue to do.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Chair, the wage subsidy was put in place to support businesses and SMEs, to avoid closures and bankruptcy. Have I missed something? Is the Liberal Party on the verge of bankruptcy? Is it about to shut down?

Does the Prime Minister consider that the Liberal Party is getting ready to close its doors?



**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for the question. I want to point out that, as the hon. member said, the wage subsidy was really put in place to protect workers across Canada. We are proud of that. More than 2 million Canadians have benefited from this—

**The Chair:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, the Liberal Party made \$3 million between January and March of this year. That's \$3 million in political donations. We're told that the emergency subsidy is being used to protect the jobs of Liberal Party employees. I'm not an accountant, but I can count.

I'm wondering why the Liberal Party doesn't use its own money to pay its own employees instead of using the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** I thank the hon. member for her question.

I would like to point out again that the purpose of the Canada emergency wage subsidy is to support workers across Canada and Quebec, to help them keep their jobs and allow them to stay connected to their workplace.

That is what we've done. More than 2 million Canadians are benefiting from this important and truly essential program for our country. We are proud of it.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, does the Deputy Prime Minister think it is moral, fair and honest that employees who have lost their jobs are subsidizing an emergency wage subsidy for the Liberal Party of Canada out of their taxes?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Our programs do not discriminate. They are there to help all workers. The hon. member talked about businesses and sectors that need more help. We agree. There is still a lot to do, but we want to work with all the—

**The Chair:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, many struggling businesses in Quebec don't have access to the Canada emergency wage subsidy because they don't meet the eligibility criteria. Many tourism and municipal organizations, among others, don't have access to this wage subsidy. However, it's very clear that the Liberal Party qualifies according to the program criteria.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister really think it's moral for her party to benefit from the emergency wage subsidy when it has the financial means to pay its own employees?

• (1235)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** I thank the hon. member for her question.

I agree that there is still a lot to do. We are ready, and we are taking action. However, it's important to point out that our government has already done a lot to support Canadians. We've spent \$152 billion in direct support measures to Canadians. More than eight million people are benefiting from the CERB, and more than two million—

**The Chair:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, what I understand is not really complicated to understand. I understand that the Liberal Party has money, that it has money to pay its employees, but that it doesn't want to cut the booty it has amassed for the next election. It's as if it were telling us that it's indirectly financing itself for the next election.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister show some leadership and convince her own party to give up the emergency wage subsidy and even commit to paying back the money it has already received?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I want to point out that our programs do not discriminate. They are there to help all workers across the country, and I want to point out to what extent our programs do that.

Eight million people are currently benefiting from the CERB, and two million are supported by the emergency wage subsidy. Our programs are also helping 380,000 students and 639,000 businesses—

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll now continue with Mr. Singh.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Canadians and people across the world are reeling after seeing the images of George Floyd being brutally killed in a callous and casual manner. We're struggling with the impacts of anti-black racism. Anti-black racism hasn't just appeared or increased. It's now simply being captured by video.

Canada is also no different. Anti-black racism also impacts Canada, and people here are feeling the frustration of black lives being neglected and ignored. Will the government commit to tracking race-based data in terms of COVID-19's impact on communities, particularly black Canadians, and track race-based data so that we can have a better response based on the evidence?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I would like to start by thanking the member opposite for his very important question and the very important work he has done throughout his career in drawing attention to racism in Canada and in fighting against it. Thank you.

I agree strongly with the member opposite that we, as Canadians, must be the opposite of complacent. We have to acknowledge that anti-black racism is real in our country, that unconscious bias is real in our country and that systemic discrimination is real. It happens here. We have to commit today to working hard to fight it.

I have more to say about disaggregated data and the coronavirus, and I hope I'll have a chance to do that in my next answer.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Thank you for that openness on the part of the government. I want more and clear commitments.

We also know that race-based or discriminatory police practices still exist across Canada.

Will the government commit to working with provinces to ensure there are no such practices allowed to exist in Canada, particularly related to discriminatory police practices like carding? Will the federal government work and use its powers to end those discriminatory practices where federal regulation applies, and work with the provinces to ensure this happens across the country?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you again for that very important question.

First of all, on coronavirus, our government believes that disaggregated data, including when it comes to race, is extremely important. We're working with our provincial partners on that.

On policing, racial profiling is unacceptable and unlawful. We will always work to uphold the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to ensure the human rights of everyone in Canada are protected. At the federal level, RCMP members are guided by bias-free policing based on equality and non-discrimination.

• (1240)

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** I want to change tracks, Mr. Chair, and talk about long-term care.

How many times did the Prime Minister's Office and the Liberal government meet with lobbyists from for-profit long-term care homes from March 25 to April 22, during the worst impacts of COVID-19 in long-term care homes?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, at this moment I can only speak for myself, and I have not met with any such lobbyists during that period or at other times.

I share the member opposite's concerns about long-term care facilities in Canada. We have to do better, and we will.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** It was 12 times during the worst impacts of COVID-19. While seniors were dying in long-term care homes, the Prime Minister's Office and the Liberal government met with private, for-profit long-term care home lobbyists 12 times.

Why did the Prime Minister's Office and the Liberal government choose to meet with these for-profit long-term care home lobbyists instead of meeting with those to solve the problem? Instead of making excuses about the federal government not playing a role, why didn't the Prime Minister and the Liberal government show leadership in calling for an end to profit in long-term care homes?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Let me very clear about one thing, speaking on behalf of our government and on behalf of the Prime Minister. Our government sees as a matter of utmost concern and utmost urgency what has been happening in long-term care homes in our country, and the reports we have received from the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces about facilities in Ontario and Quebec need to be treated as historic documents that—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Now it's Mr. Rayes's turn.

Mr. Rayes, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Mr. Chair, why is it that employers from industry, businesses and community organizations that have been approved in the Canada summer jobs program still haven't received the money they're entitled to?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development):** We are ensuring that the Canada summer jobs program is strengthened and enforced. We are making it more available to more students. We have lengthened the time period that the program—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Rayes has the floor.

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Every day, the Prime Minister makes announcements in front of his residence.

I'll repeat my question.

Given the importance of the program for our youth who are looking to work, how is it that the organizations haven't yet received the money they need to hire students? As we know, there have been some problems with the CESB.

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Our government is working hard to help employers adapt to the realities of COVID-19. We recognize the important role that the Canada summer jobs program plays in supporting employers and young workers in communities across the country every year. That is why we have introduced flexibilities in the Canada summer jobs program to hire youth while providing more supports to employers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** The minister can say whatever he wants. Last year, there was no crisis and, as of April, all employers who had been admitted to the program had received the money. We are currently in a crisis. The government is trying to respond quickly to the needs. Right now, community organizations are not receiving the money to which they are entitled to hire students, to put them to work and to give them an employment opportunity.

Why?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we have managed to introduce flexibilities to take into consideration the difficult environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the flexibilities we've introduced into the Canada summer jobs program will help with more hiring of youth and more supports to employers, including non-profits and businesses that deliver essential services to Canadians.

These changes will help small businesses hire and keep the workers that they need in the Canada summer jobs program.

• (1245)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** The young people and employers listening to us must be very surprised by what the minister is saying. He mentioned that the rules are now more flexible. However, it is taking a month and a half longer than last year. The money has not yet been given out.

I have done my homework. I went to see what was happening in my riding and in about 10 other ridings. Last year, in my riding, all the money had been deposited before April. Right now, there is a \$240,000 shortfall for about 60 student jobs, and the minister has the nerve to tell us that the government has provided more flexibility.

Why is the money not available if the government wants to act quickly, to help the economy recover and to help young people?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, indeed we are acting quickly. We are listening to the needs of the employers to make sure that this program works not only for them but also for youth, and that it gives them the experiences they need. It is adapted better for the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that youth have the experience they need to gain life and work skills from the program.

It's a great program, and we're making it work not just for businesses but also for non-profits.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Here is the reality. Last week, the owner of a hardware store in a village in my riding had to close his business because he was unable to hire students and had no one to work.

This morning, an employer called me to tell me that his request to hire a student had been accepted, but that the delay meant that he could not proceed with the hiring. This means that one more young person will not have a job. That young person will therefore have to receive the CESB. There is the reality.

When is the government going to release the money required for young people to be able to work?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, I join the honourable member in recognizing that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic there are some difficulties in terms of structuring the program and making sure that employers are able to access it. That is why we've introduced flexibilities to ensure that employers are able to access the program and that youth are also able to take advantage of the program to gain important work skills, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially in providing essential services that serve their fellow Canadians.

It's a great program. We're doing everything that we can to work through some of those obstacles.

**The Chair:** We'll now continue with Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

By its own numbers, PSPC has had to cut the number of N95 masks the government has on order after cancelling contracts with companies that were not able to meet Canadian standards.

We know that companies right here in Canada were willing to step up and fill in the gap. Will the minister commit to making domestic production of PPE, including N95 masks, a priority?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement):** Mr. Chair, our priority is to make sure that we get safe and effective equipment and supplies into the hands of front-line health care workers.

We've been running multiple complementary supply chains at the same time. Building up domestic capacity is indeed a priority. We have a contract with Medicom in Montreal for the production of N95 masks and we will continue to work hard to ensure—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Mr. Chair, Novo Textiles, a company in my riding, has retooled its factory to produce surgical masks in response to the shortage of PPE in Canada. Additionally, it will soon be producing quality made-in-Canada N95 masks using Canadian designs and Canadian-made machinery. My constituent has invested his own capital and is in active production supplying front-line workers right now, not just talking about it.

However, the company's application to NGen was recently rejected. Canada needs masks now, masks that meet Canadian standards. Is the government serious about growing domestic production capacity, or is it all talk and no action?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** In reality, we have received 101.3 million surgical masks that are being distributed out to provinces and territories. We have signed 24 contracts with domestic companies for the production of PPE right here at home. We are working very hard, Mr. Chair, to make sure Canadian front-line health care workers have exactly what they need to fight this pandemic.

• (1250)

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Mr. Chair, how many of these have received financial support from the government?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** Mr. Chair, I'm not quite sure what the member is referring to by "how many of these", but as I said, we have signed 24 contracts with domestic—

**The Chair:** We'll have to go back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Where are these manufacturers located?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** Mr. Chair, we have surgical masks being produced right here at home, as well as abroad, being brought into Canada—

**The Chair:** Back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** What provinces are they in?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** Mr. Chair, as I said, we have a contract with General Motors for the production of surgical masks—

**The Chair:** Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Are there any in any provinces besides Ontario and Quebec?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** Mr. Chair, we have contracts with multiple provinces throughout this country for the production of personal protective equipment. We are committed—

**The Chair:** Back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** How many of these domestic manufacturers rely on supply chains in China?

**Hon. Anita Anand:** Mr. Chair, we are dealing with a situation of very high global demand for the same product. As a result, we—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Will the Minister commit to providing my office with answers to these questions? Thank you.

**Hon. Anita Anand:** I will commit, Mr. Chair, to continuing to work hard for Canadians to supply the personal protective equipment that they need. We have been giving updated numbers on our website—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Ms. Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** I'm going to assume that answer is “no”.

Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister introduced the Canada student service grant on April 22. Students were told details would arrive in a matter of weeks. It's been over a month, the “I Want To Help” platform has no details yet about eligibility, levels of funding, or how to apply. Post-secondary students are already one-quarter into their summer break. When can students expect to start applying for the CSSG so they can receive their grants?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth):** Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to share that students can anticipate more programs coming out as soon as possible. The “I Want to Help” website will be launched. Students can already apply for Canada summer jobs if they go to [jobbank.gc.ca](http://jobbank.gc.ca). By visiting [Canada.ca/coronavirus](http://Canada.ca/coronavirus), you'll see a suite of programs to ensure that students and young people are able to succeed. The coronavirus will not win, and our government will continue investing in our leaders of today and tomorrow.

**The Chair:** The next set of questions goes to Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last week the President of the Treasury Board wrote a letter to his cabinet colleagues in which he said that, as the federal minister responsible for public access to government information, he has advised his cabinet colleagues of the need for transparency and accountability, even in times of crisis.

My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. Does she agree with the President of the Treasury Board's directive?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Chair, the government remains committed to maintaining the openness and transparency of our government during this challenging time. The Government of Canada, along with provincial and territorial governments, have implemented exceptional workplace measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, and to protect the health and safety of federal employees. These measures have had an impact on institutions' abilities to respond to access to information and personal information requests, since most employees are now working from their homes.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Frankly, I'm surprised that the answer is coming from that minister when the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is in the House, but I will ask this question.

Can the minister tell Canadians who Pierre Lavallée is?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Treasury Board Secretariat has provided guidance to institutions to continue to make the best efforts to respond to Access to Information Act and Privacy Act requests and to provide published content—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities tell us who Pierre Lavallée is?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

• (1255)

**Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities):** Mr. Chair, of course. Pierre Lavallée was the former CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We are very proud that we now have Michael Sabia as the new chair of the Infrastructure Bank. He did a fabulous job in Montreal at—

**The Chair:** We'll now go back to Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Can the minister tell me how long Mr. Lavallée was the CEO of the Infrastructure Bank?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Chair, I can't give you the exact months. He was the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank since the beginning, but let's be clear: Crown corporations work at arm's length from the government and must have—

**The Chair:** We'll return to Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Can I ask the minister how well she knows her file: 50%, 75% or 100%?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Chair, that's quite a condescending little comment. I'd like to say that I know my file very well. What I know is that Canadians want infrastructure built, they want it built across the country, in the member opposite's riding and in ridings across the country. They want cleaner, healthier, more connected—

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** How much of the \$35 billion of infrastructure money that was allocated to that bank has been spent so far?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Chair, the Infrastructure Bank is a new, more flexible financing model for infrastructure investments. It was set up; it is now in its new phase. We're very excited that it's going to be moving forward—and stay tuned.

**Mr. John Brassard:** In the context of Mr. Duclos' advice to his cabinet colleagues about openness and transparency, I'd like to ask the minister how much Mr. Lavallée was paid annually.

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Chair, as I said, Crown corporations work at arm's length from the government. Our government follows the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act when it comes to employee compensation, but remuneration ranges are publicly available. I'd note that this information for the bank's CEOs has been in the public domain—

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Mr. Chair, I'm asking the minister how much Mr. Lavallée made. There was no answer to that. If it is in the public realm, she should know that. She said she knows her file very well.

How much of a bonus was Mr. Lavallée paid recently when he left on April 2?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Chair, I am not involved in HR discussions when it comes to the Canada Infrastructure Bank and Mr. Lavallée. Crown corporations work at arm's length from the government. They need to have flexibility to meet their commercial mandates.

As I say, the information about salary ranges is publicly available, but personal HR—

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Mr. Chair, could you stop my...? I'm hearing....

**The Chair:** I would ask those of us virtually to mute.

Mr. Brassard, there is about 15 seconds left. I'll cue you for a very short question.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

According to a table, Mr. Lavallée could have received a bonus after year one of zero to 75% of his base salary, which was \$510,000 to \$600,000 per year; or in year two, which he was in, zero to 120% of his base salary. How much of a bonus did he receive?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** The rate of any remuneration paid to the chief executive officer is based on the recommendations of the board. Our government follows the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act when it comes to employee compensation. Let me say this: We're very excited about the new phase of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We have Michael Sabia there as the new board chair. We need to move forward on—

**The Chair:** We'll now continue with Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Parliament's now been suspended for three months, since Friday, March 13. Will the government commit to reopening the House of

Commons with its full powers, with social distancing, on Monday, September 21?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Mr. Chair, as my colleague knows, we're meeting here four days a week, with questions on any topic for an hour and 35 minutes instead of 45 minutes a day. Democracy is as important for us as it is for the opposition.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Chair, this committee is neutered. It has no powers to introduce supply day motions, no powers to test government confidence, no powers to do the usual things that Parliament does. At times of crisis, the bedrock principles of rule of law and democracy are tested, and our democratic principles are buckling under the pressure from this government.

They came to office promising greater transparency, but they broke almost every one of their promises. They broke their promise on electoral reform. They appointed an anti-Conservative organization, Unifor, to the media bailout fund. In the last parliament, they tried to give the PMO control over this legislature in Motion No. 6, and in the last election, they rigged the leaders' debates in their favour, and now they have suspended Parliament.

Instead of this neutered committee that meets for only a few days with a few members, will the government commit to the full reopening of this House with all its powers with social distancing on Monday, September 21?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Chair, the government's objective is always to try to resume Parliament as it was before. Today, we have to live with this pandemic, but we will do everything we can to return to a normal situation as quickly as possible. That is clear and precise.

The opposition asked for more time, especially to ask questions, and that is what it got. I would like my colleague to tell me one thing. Over the past few weeks, we have sent suggestions to opposition members about the operation of Parliament and they have never responded. I would like to know why.

[*English*]

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Chair, the full parliament with its full powers sat through two world wars, previous pandemics and the October crisis in 1970. The governments of those days did not seek the suspension of the House.

The government is not only failing to defend democracy here but also abroad. It can't utter the word "Taiwan". It is failing to be strong and clear on Hong Kong and, while the situation today is not that of decades past, it is clear that Canada in the past stood for the rights of people in Hong Kong. Canada needs to take much stronger diplomatic action on Hong Kong. There are some 300,000 Canadians living there, and they are looking for the government's support.

When will this government act? When will it threaten economic sanctions like the U.S. administration has? When will it provide asylum and a clear path to citizenship like the U.K. government has? When will it speak up against the Communist Party of China's United Front workers operating here in this country? When will it do like Australia did in calling for an international investigation of COVID-19, and organize an international coalition of like-minded democracies to defend Hong Kongers and the violation of the Sino-British treaty?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Mr. Chair, I'll remind the member to look at our statement of May 28. It's already done. Canada has spoken to the world; Canada has spoken up. We've made a first declaration with our colleagues in Australia and the U.K. to say that we have deep concerns.

We all know that the one country, two systems—the high degree of liberty and freedom enjoyed by the people in Hong Kong—has made Hong Kong what it is today, a beacon when it comes to trade and financing. We know that and have expressed deep concern. Again, on May 28, with the United States, with the United Kingdom and with Australia, Canada was front and centre in saying that we have deep concerns that the imposition of a national security law by Beijing would undermine the very foundation, the very principles that have made Hong Kong so successful. We said that we and our international partners would look at the implications and the ramifications that this might have on our arrangement.

I've called for a meeting of our Five Eyes partners tonight. I'll be chairing a meeting of our Five Eyes partners with the foreign ministers. We will be discussing it and will continue to raise our voices to stand up for the people of Hong Kong, and we will do it with our allies.

**The Chair:** We will now go to Mr. Maguire.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Chair, farmers have contacted my office about the massive delays with processing the advance payment program loans. Some put their applications in almost two months ago, and not a dollar has flowed.

What's the point of having an advance payment program if there's no payment?

Can the Minister of Agriculture tell us when these delays will end?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Mr. Chair, I can assure you that we are working with all the independent operators. This program is not administered by their officials, but by partners. I can assure you that, under the cir-

cumstances, they are doing their best to make the advance payments—

• (1305)

[*English*]

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Farmers understand that some of the delays were caused by staff having to work remotely. However, did the minister approve a policy change on April 1 that made the eligibility for these loans more difficult during the middle of a pandemic, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, a number of changes and improvements have been made to the program. To make things easier for our administrators, we have postponed some of the changes that could have been problematic.

[*English*]

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Yes, so some of the changes made it more problematic for the producers.

The minister must take responsibility for these delays. Farmers deserve an answer on why she changed the program. Who advised her that it would be a good idea to make it more difficult for the farmers to access the advance payment program in the middle of a pandemic? Or did she just go ahead and do this on her own?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, we are constantly working with the administrators of the program. We are fully prepared to respond to their requests so that the advance payments program can best serve our producers across the country.

[*English*]

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Livestock producers are telling me that the premiums for the western livestock insurance program are too high. I told the Minister of Agriculture over two weeks ago that this was a problem, and yet she went out and said that farmers needed to make better use of existing support.

When will the Minister of Agriculture listen to what the farmers are saying so they can actually use the existing programs?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, I would like to remind everyone that we have put in place certain measures to improve access to AgriStability.

We have also significantly improved the AgriRecovery program. Over the past few years, this program amounted to about \$15 million. It is now \$100 million for pork and beef producers alone, not counting the \$77.5 million for food processors.

[English]

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Livestock producers in my riding and several across Canada are still waiting for the Minister of Agriculture's promise for an AgriRecovery program. When will the Minister of Agriculture stop rubbing salt in the farmers' wounds and provide the rest of the story she has been saying is on its way for over a month now in her AgriRecovery promise?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, we have committed \$50 million to beef producers and \$50 million to pork producers through the AgriRecovery program. Here is how the program works: the federal government contributes up to 60% and then the provinces implement it how they see fit.

[English]

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** The funding announced by the Minister of Agriculture for the livestock industry was insufficient, and what was promised has not been delivered. This has caused hogs to be euthanized and over 100,000 feeder cattle to become overweight. The industry is in a crisis. How many livestock producers need to go bankrupt before they get the help they deserve?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, once again, we have significantly increased the amounts available through AgriRecovery. It is \$50 million for beef producers and \$50 million for pork producers. These programs are administered by the provinces. There is also \$77.5 million for processors.

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Chair, we know that not everyone experiences economic recovery in the same way. In some sectors, such as tourism, fishery, hotels and restaurants, we do not know when activity will resume or whether it will resume slowly. This is a major concern for workers, because they do not know what will happen tomorrow. They do not know how much they will be able to earn this summer.

Given that the CERB lasts 16 weeks, they are all afraid that they will be left with nothing. Without a job, they have no income.

Will the Minister of Finance announce now that he is extending the CERB?

• (1310)

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we moved very quickly at the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to support workers—those who have lost their jobs, who were laid off, or those whose jobs simply disappeared—through the Canada emergency response benefit. It has provided immense support to the over eight million Canadian workers who have applied to the CERB.

We will continue to support those workers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, my question was clear. We know why the CERB was put in place. It does not need to be explained to us again.

For some workers, the CERB will end tomorrow morning. There will be no recovery in their sector. Examples include bars, sports training, arts and culture. They don't know when they will start up again.

Is the government prepared to extend the Canada emergency response benefit now?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, the workers that the honourable member identified, including those who were not eligible for the EI, were also covered by the Canada emergency response benefit. We moved quickly. We recognized the urgency of the situation, which is why we took action to support workers and their families through the Canada emergency response benefit. We have processed over eight million applications through that benefit.

We will continue to support Canadian workers at this very difficult time.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, are we going to continue to help workers in these difficult times? The answer is simple.

Some don't know what they are going to do tomorrow morning. They do not know whether they will have an income to pay their bills. They have families, they have other needs. The CERB is going to end. This is the last period for some people.

Can you do anything about it? Can I walk out of the House today and tell all those people that the CERB is going to be extended?

**Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the honourable member for her question.

We will clearly maintain our approach. We will look at how we can improve and change our programs, such as the wage subsidy. Of course, we are looking at how we can gradually reopen our economy by continuing to help people to be in a good position.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, we are making progress. Yes, the decision is to extend the wage subsidy. I think we must do the same with the CERB, which is about to end.

Another important commitment is the employment incentives. I don't know about you, but we see it in our ridings. People are scared because the economy is reopening in certain sectors. People are afraid to go back to work. People are afraid to go back to full-time jobs because they are afraid of losing all their emergency benefits. This affects workers and students alike.

Are you prepared to take action on this issue? You have also promised to implement employment incentives.

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, we know that, with a responsible reopening of the economy, we have to look at our programs to make sure that we are keeping and protecting people. That continues to be our approach. We will look at changes and improvements. In that way, we will continue our responsible reopening of the economy.

**The Chair:** We are going to take a break so that our employees can change shifts without jeopardizing their health.

While we have a few seconds, I would also like to remind members to address their questions to the chair, not directly to the ministers.

[English]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** We'll now carry on.

We'll go to Mr. Easter in Malpeque.

• (1315)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with the member for Brampton North.

Today, June 1, under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization, we celebrate World Milk Day. World Milk Day allows us to emphasize the importance of milk as a global food, its benefits for our health as well as our nutrition; and to celebrate the dairy sector, from the primary producers to the processors who ensure that our many high-quality dairy products get to the marketplace.

Canadians are fortunate to have a thriving dairy sector that, under supply management, provides high-quality products at reasonable prices to consumers. Even under supply management though, dairy farmers have found themselves facing difficult challenges as a result of recent trade agreements and sudden market shocks as a result of the pandemic.

Mr. Chair, to acknowledge World Milk Day, I'd love to be able to raise a glass of wholesome white or chocolate milk, but we can't do that.

On the other hand, I must ask the Minister of Agriculture what the government is doing to support the dairy sector in these times so we can celebrate World Milk Day next year with more vim and vigour.

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Mr. Easter, from the great riding of Malpeque in Prince Edward Island.

Today it is particularly important to thank families working on the 11,000 dairy farms across the country, caring for 1.4 million cows to produce each year more than 9.3 billion litres of milk of the highest quality.

The dairy sector in Canada is made up of more than 220,000 Canadians and foreign workers who dedicate their lives to feed us. While our society lives through unprecedented changes, the dairy

sector demonstrates its resilience and proves more than ever the value of the supply management system.

It is why we increased by \$200 million the borrowing capacity of the Canadian Dairy Commission to improve its butter and cheese storage programs, giving the flexibility to manage the surplus of milk and support its mandate. Over the past few years, we have invested in dairy farms and given direct compensation to dairy farmers through trade agreements with Europe and Asia. We will do the same for the new NAFTA.

Raise a glass for World Milk Day.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go to Ms. Sahota in Brampton North.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, last week a horrific video surfaced showing the killing of an unarmed black man at the hands of the Minneapolis police. George Floyd's death was the latest in a series of unwarranted deaths of black men and women at the hands of police.

Since his death, solidarity protests have erupted across cities in the United States and all over the world asking for justice and a stop to systemic dehumanization of black people.

I wish I could say we are, but sadly we are not immune to the reality of what is happening south of the border. The same protests taking place in New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Berlin, Paris and London are also taking place in our own backyard. In cities like Montreal and Toronto, thousands of people have already taken to the streets, not only to decry anti-black racism but also to ask for tangible solutions to effectively combat anti-black racism.

We don't have to wait for pain, suffering and outrage to boil to the surface to act. There's nothing we know today that we didn't already know.

As Canadians are demonstrating and calling on their society and governments to do better, can the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth tell us what this government is doing to address anti-black racism in Canada and to ensure we are evening the playing field for black Canadians?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger:** Mr. Chair, the MP for Brampton North is correct. Anti-black racism, racism and discrimination are present in Canada. With COVID-19, we have even seen a rise in anti-Asian racism. We all must speak out against racism and discrimination. Keeping silent is to condone these horrific acts.



These acts don't have to be violent or result in the loss of life to be wrong. In fact, the actions of Amy Cooper shone a light on the stealth racism that exists. We must acknowledge inequities in our institutions and in people's lived experiences. If we as Canadians truly desire an inclusive Canada, every single one of us must step up, be an ally and do what we can to make workplaces, communities and public spaces safer.

Our government has started this work. The open, transparent, merit-based appointment process is resulting in decision-making tables better reflecting Canadians. We recognize the UN International Decade for People of African Descent; the applications for capacity building in black Canadian communities are being assessed; the anti-racism secretariat is set up for Canadians but also for government departments to improve their systems, including advancement opportunities; and the recently announced immunity task force will provide disaggregated data to decision-makers because decisions need to be based on science and evidence.

This work is by no means finished. Although our government is moving in the right decision, there is clearly a lot more work to do and we are committed to doing that work with communities as allies, as partners.

• (1320)

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll go to Mr. Duvall from Hamilton Mountain.

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be splitting my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Chair, workers' unions, business leaders and analysts across the country are raising a huge alarm over potential bankruptcies due to COVID-19. Thousands of Canadian workers are exposed and vulnerable.

For years the government has promised to change the laws to protect workers from corporate bankruptcy, but has failed to deliver. Will this government fix the law before more Canadian workers lose their hard-earned pensions?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Labour):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for that question and for his advocacy on this file. I remind the member that since 2015 one of our first initiatives was the repealing of Bills C-525 and C-377, which were anti-union legislation.

Since then, we've implemented a number of measures to protect workers. We've increased the wage earner protection program by extending it from four weeks to seven weeks. The member is well aware that in 2019—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go back to Mr. Duvall.

**Mr. Scott Duvall:** Mr. Chair, the changes the government made last year to bankruptcy insolvency laws were largely cosmetic and won't protect workers' and pensioners' livelihoods once bankruptcy hits.

The government can protect severance, termination pay, pensions and benefits from corporate theft, but will they do it, yes or no?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Filomena Tassi:** Mr. Chair, we made a number of significant changes in budget 2019, including that the process for the CCAA be more open and transparent. We mandated that those who are coming to the process have to be honest and truthful. One thing we heard in the consultations was the ability for courts to set aside executive bonuses, and we implemented all those changes because we want to continue to protect pensioners.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** You have time for a short question, Mr. Duvall.

**Mr. Scott Duvall:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The minister isn't answering the question. Canadian workers are worried. This is about their livelihoods. Will the government fix the laws—yes or no—to protect workers' and pensioners' rights?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Filomena Tassi:** Mr. Chair, we have made amendments, and we are going to continue to make amendments. We want to absolutely ensure that pensions are protected. I look forward to working collaboratively with the member.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go to Mr. Blaikie, Elmwood—Transcona.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Twice, following negotiations with the NDP, the government has committed to provide direct financial assistance to people living with disabilities. I'm wondering when those people can expect the government to announce the details of that assistance.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we are committed to advancing on the issues that have been identified by Canadians with disabilities. We are continuing that engagement, and we will have more to say on that very soon.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I think that answer is entirely inadequate. I have a lot of sympathy for people across the country who are living with disabilities and are getting impatient with the fact that alongside its initial commitment to seniors, for instance, the government made a commitment to helping people living with disabilities with the same kind of direct financial assistance, and it hasn't come.

Why has it taken so long for the government to get around to helping people who are in a crisis right now? I want to know the reason why this hasn't been announced yet.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we have established the COVID-19 disability advisory group, comprising experts in disability inclusion. We're moving forward with the Canada emergency student benefit, which will provide \$2,000 per month for eligible students with permanent disabilities. We are doubling the Canada student grants for students with disabilities in the coming academic year.

We have done a lot, but we will continue to do more, and we will have more to share on our continuing efforts to support persons with disabilities.

• (1325)

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie. You have time for one short question.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Their commitment was not around an advisory commitment. Their commitment was for direct financial assistance to people living with disabilities who are facing additional costs because of the pandemic. They have committed twice and they have done nothing. When are they going to get around to it? Why should people living with disabilities have to wait any longer than they already have?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, that is precisely why we are listening closely to the COVID-19 disability advisory group to get expert advice. We will have more to share. There is more work to come, and there will be results to be announced very soon.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go to Mr. McLean, Calgary Centre.

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

According to La Presse, federal cabinet ministers Steven Guilbeault, Catherine McKenna and Jonathan Wilkinson have been handed responsibility for crafting an economic recovery plan that aims to accelerate the green shift.

True to form, this cabal around the Prime Minister has declared "let's not let a good crisis go to waste". Can the Prime Minister confirm that his ministers have been working with environmental lobby groups for further financial support to engineer Canada's economy post COVID?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable Minister of Middle Class Prosperity.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance):** Mr. Chair, our most urgent priority is COVID-19 and the health and safety of Canadians. As we support Canadians through this time, we will also ensure our long-term economic, environmental and physical well-being. Our government remains committed to building a stronger and more resilient economy to ensure a sustainable, prosperous future for our kids and grandkids. Just like science is guiding us in our response to COVID-19, science will continue to guide us toward reduced pollution and in fighting climate change.

**Mr. Greg McLean:** The task force for a resilient recovery was quoted as saying last week that they would have recommendations

for government action available within eight weeks, notably eight weeks when Parliament is, by this government's design, absent.

Can the Prime Minister disclose to this committee how many meetings his 61 environmental activist advisers have had with the task force or its members?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Mr. Chair, our most urgent priority with respect to COVID-19 is the health and safety of Canadians. While supporting Canadians during this period, we must also ensure our economic, environmental and physical well-being in the long term.

Our government remains committed to building a stronger, more resilient economy to ensure a sustainable future for our grandchildren and children.

[English]

**Mr. Greg McLean:** The task force is a who's who of academics and bureaucrats, but surprisingly, includes no one from the productive part of the Canadian economy. So much for pan-Canadian input.

The task force is reviewing work produced by Smart Prosperity, a government-funded institute whose membership overlaps with both the task force and the government's own Canadian Institute for Climate Choices. This is a bureaucratic environmental Ponzi scheme, with overlapping personnel and mandates. The only thing not overlapping is their funding.

How many organizations does this government need to fund to recycle work produced by other redundant government-funded entities?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Mr. Chair, as we know, our priority right now is the health and safety of Canadians. Just as science guides us in our response to COVID-19, it will continue to guide us in reducing pollution and fighting climate change.

Our priority is to support Canadians during this period and we must also ensure our environmental, economic and physical well-being in the long term.

[English]

**Mr. Greg McLean:** A notable member of the task force in question is one Gerald Butts. Perhaps it's just a coincidence, but can the Prime Minister confirm if this is the same Gerald Butts who was forced to resign as his principal secretary for his role in attempting to force Canada's then justice minister into breaking the law?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Mr. Chair, since the beginning of this crisis, our priority has been to support Canadians and their health and safety. We will continue to do so, because it is important that we get through this crisis by supporting Canadians.

[English]

**Mr. Greg McLean:** Mr. Chair, is this the same Gerald Butts who was paid \$360,000 U.S. by an American-funded organization after he started working with the Prime Minister?

• (1330)

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Once again, Mr. Chair, it is important to talk to Canadians right now to tell them that we are putting their health and safety first. We will continue to do so. We are going through a crisis right now and we will support Canadians.

[English]

**Mr. Greg McLean:** Mr. Chair, is this the same Gerald Butts who, in his role as the principal secretary in the office of Ontario's then premier, advanced policies that now saddle Ontarians with the highest energy costs in North America? Is this the same Gerald Butts who weighed down Ontario with the world's highest subnational debt burden, all for the benefit of new green jobs that, notably, have never arrived?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Mr. Chair, as we know, for the past two and a half months, we have been supporting Canadians. We have put forward an economic program to help businesses, workers and Canadians across the country.

We will continue to make the health and safety of Canadians a priority.

[English]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go to the MP for West Nova, Mr. d'Entremont.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Yesterday, the Minister responsible for tourism, ACOA and official languages was happy to close our national Tourism Week by announcing investments of \$70 million to offset financial losses in the tourism industry across Canada.

Where's the big clap?

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** There you go, give her a clap.

More than \$70 million will be invested to support this sector and promote Canadian destinations. Southern Ontario received \$30 million, northern Ontario received \$7 million and western Canada received \$3.5 million. There's nothing for Atlantic Canada yet.

Knowing that we just had an announcement from the Minister of Transport that there will be no cruise ships in Atlantic Canada or anywhere in Canada this year, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in losses, where is the program for Atlantic Canada?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages):** Mr. Chair, I commend my colleague for his important question. I know he's a very strong advocate for the tourism sector in Atlantic Canada, so I want to reassure him. Obviously, we want to support the tourism sector in Atlantic Canada. ACOA has a clear direction to do just that. If he has any good ideas, please let him come forward and let's have a conversation.

Meanwhile, Atlantic Canada will also be supported through Destination Canada. Rather than doing marketing internationally, we will be supporting destination marketing organizations across the country, including in Atlantic Canada, to make sure that we launch this new movement to visit local.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** That would be all great if we weren't in the middle of a pandemic and you can't even cross the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border without having to self-isolate for two weeks. It's going to make travelling, through the Maritimes at least, very difficult.

In Saint John, New Brunswick, 79 cruise ships and more than 270,000 passengers will not be giving back to that local community. At home in Nova Scotia, it's about 118 or 130 vessels. In terms of a minimum financial loss, \$165 million will not be generated. There will be job losses and permanent closures of restaurants and boardwalk shops.

Prince Edward Island, which was expected to have a record attendance year, will lose visits of 97 ships and 154,000 passengers, and \$60 million to the province's economy will be lost.

Mr. Chair, my question to the minister is this: Who is ACOA going to be working with, and what kinds of programs are going to be available to help them through this very difficult year?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I agree with my colleague. The sector is really impacted by the pandemic and the economic crisis. It is a bit like the canary in the coal mine; it was the first impacted, and definitely it is still impacted. That's why we are in close contact with tourism leaders and operators across the country.

Again, recently I had good conversations with the chambers of commerce all across Atlantic Canada, including Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador for the tourism sector. There is money for the tourism sector and tourism operators. They can have access to the wage subsidy. They wanted to have access to it until later in the summer, and it has been extended to the end of August. They have access to the rent relief program, the CEBA and ACOA funding.

As mentioned many times in this chamber, Mr. Chair, if my colleague has clear examples to provide me, let's work together. Let's make sure the money flows to these people, because they need it.

• (1335)

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** You have only about a minute left, Mr. d'Entremont.

[Translation]

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Mr. Chair, like the minister, last week, I spoke with Simon-Pierre Poulin, the director of *Le Franco* newspaper in Alberta, about the “Sauvons Saint-Jean” movement.

He asked me why we could not continue to work on official languages and on modernizing the act even though Parliament is sitting in a different configuration. Unfortunately, I had to explain to him that many restrictions were associated with the current format of this fake Parliament.

The pandemic is also threatening the protection of French in minority communities. The Liberal government made a commitment to modernize the Official Languages Act in the first six months of its mandate.

How will it proceed?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Mr. Chair, it goes without saying that our two official languages are important and that, when it comes to language rights, we must always be on guard and protect what we have achieved.

As for Campus Saint-Jean, I am very aware of the issue. I had the opportunity to speak with my two counterparts in Alberta late Friday afternoon to tell them about our concerns and the need to protect the institution from drastic cuts. That was the first point.

The second point is the modernization of the Official Languages Act. I have the same concerns as my colleague. Clearly, we must continue the conversations and find the right solutions. Finally, we must be there to protect our language rights.

If the member has good ideas, he can come to me to discuss them.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has the floor.

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Mr. Chair, some people for whom the 15 weeks of sickness benefits were not enough before the COVID-19 crisis now have to exhaust their regular employment insurance benefits before they are entitled to the CERB.

Today, I would like to know whether they will be able to exhaust their weeks of eligibility for the CERB after October 3.

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we ensured that those who switched over to the Canada emergency response benefit would be covered by it, whether they were EI eligible or not. We are committed to supporting all of the workers who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** According to a survey conducted by the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières' research institute on small and medium size businesses, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region would be the most affected by the economic effects of COVID-19. This is not surprising. In fact, in our region, the tourism industry generates more than \$300 million in economic activity, including \$58 million for the cruise industry alone.

The \$70 million that you announced yesterday is a very modest start. What does the government intend to do for the tourism industry in the regions?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Mr. Chair, it goes without saying that the tourism industry is indeed very much affected. That is why we are responding to their concerns and worries.

We have therefore extended the emergency wage subsidy until the end of August. We are also providing the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance, as well as the \$40,000 loans from the Canada emergency business account. We have also just announced \$70 million in support for Canada's tourism sector.

I am having good talks with various stakeholders in Quebec, including Martin Soucy from the Alliance de l'industrie touristique du Québec. In addition, we are going to do our part to support the tourism sector through Economic Development Canada.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Chair, the tourism industry in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region is the sum of all its stakeholders. Many of these businesses are too small to receive the assistance announced by the federal government. Overly restrictive standards will prevent some tourist accommodation from welcoming guests this year, even though they will have to pay their bills every month.

What does the government plan to do to help the regions most affected economically?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I thank my colleague for his important question. What he is describing is the reason we are currently working on a game plan. We really want to be able to reach these small businesses, of which there are many in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, in Quebec and across the country.

That is why the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have committed an additional \$1 billion to help those businesses that fall through the cracks. We need to respond now, and I will have more to say about it in the next few days.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Chair, I was very disappointed to see that we had lost asparagus crops due to a labour shortage. When I spoke with the blueberry growers in my area, they told me they were concerned that the same thing could happen to them. Some employers to whom we granted summer positions are not finding students to fill them.

When will there be incentives to encourage people to work rather than disincentives?

● (1340)

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we believe that the flexibilities we have introduced to the Canada summer jobs program will enable more employers to use it, including more businesses, as well as help young people to acquire the necessary skills and benefits from this really important program.

[Translation]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Martel, you have about a minute left.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Chair, on May 19, the government said that it was studying several solutions to help business owners and entrepreneurs who operate their business using a personal bank account. When will the Canada emergency business account be available to them?

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade):** Mr. Chair, small businesses are the heart of all of our communities, and we've been working really hard to help them. Almost 650,000 small businesses have received the loan, which is really helping with those costs.

We have more work to do to make sure that those other businesses also get access to this support.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll now go to Mr. Epp, the member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish to congratulate my colleague, Cathy McLeod. On Tuesday, May 26, she gained a new resident when Brinnley Lisette Hubby was born to parents Adam and Carina Hubby. Carina is my daughter, and that makes Brinnley my first grandchild and presently my favourite newest Canadian. All are healthy, and I thank God for Brinnley's healthy arrival.

**Some honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Minister Jordan, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is allowed access to the seafood stabilization fund, while you deny its competitor, our Ontario fisheries that fish on the Great Lakes, the similar right to apply.

Minister, why?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague for the very good question.

The Ontario inland fishers and the people in Ontario are eligible for other programs that are offered through the regional development agencies.

We are going to make sure that no industry is left behind when it comes to our fisheries. We're making sure that we're addressing the concerns of inland fisheries as well as coastal fisheries. Those programs will be available to anyone who needs to apply through the RDAs.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Minister, will you then direct these regional agencies to provide equitable funding equivalent to the seafood stabilization fund?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Mr. Chair, we're making sure that they have the same access to programs through the regional development agencies as there is through the seafood stabilization fund. We're making sure that everyone who is in need of support through the programs will be able to access it.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** According to Stats Canada, before my granddaughter turns one year old, her share of the federal debt will be over \$39,000.

What is Minister Morneau's fiscal plan for Canada so that the interest on this debt doesn't cripple Canada with higher taxes?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, we realize that it's always important to be responsible from a fiscal standpoint. We believe that the responsible approach today is to make investments to support Canadians and to support businesses. In that way we can have jobs and we can get through this pandemic and have a strong economy and be able to continue with our approach to managing our economy in a responsible—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll go back to Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Minister, when can Parliament, or this semblance of it, see that plan for economic prosperity?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I would like to remind honourable members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The honourable minister may reply.

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've been quite clear that we need to be transparent on a daily basis by giving Canadians an understanding of the investments that we're making through this pandemic. Once the situation is more stable economically, we will certainly be coming forward with a broader plan.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Mr. Chair, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce said three months before the pandemic that this current government's level of spending and incurring of debt is untenable and that future generations, like my granddaughter, will have to pay for it.

How much more debt is the minister planning to incur?

● (1345)

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, coming into this pandemic in a strong fiscal position with the lowest amount of debt among the G7 countries is a function of our economy that's afforded us the opportunity to invest on behalf of Canadians. We will continue to take that approach. We believe that's the responsible thing to do through the course of this challenge.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** What is the budget for stopping illegal American guns from getting through our borders?

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

I can tell you that we have invested considerable amounts of money and have earmarked ongoing monies to ensure that we address the issue of illegal guns passing across the border. We realize—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We'll go back to Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** What's the budget, then, to fight government-trained and licensed Canadians in the court challenge that's now been triggered?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We will go to the honourable minister.

We're not getting any audio.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Could I have some more time, please?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Yes. We're just going to hold time here momentarily, Mr. Epp.

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** I apologize, Mr. Chair.

Could I ask for the question to be repeated, please?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Epp, what is your question again?

**Mr. Dave Epp:** What is the budget for fighting the government-trained and licensed people who are now triggering a lawsuit against your order in council?

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** Mr. Chair, I don't have the answer to that question, but obviously the government will defend its position.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Mr. Chair, COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem of this government's policy of spending the cupboards bare in good times instead of planning for a rainy day—and folks, we're in a storm.

Unlike this government, municipalities cannot by law say “put it on the tab” for the next generation. The balanced budget requirements force them to choose between slashed services and drastic tax hikes. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities says they need \$10 billion in targeted emergency operating funding, so do municipalities slash services, do they raise taxes, or will we be there for the municipalities?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Our government absolutely understands the crucial role municipalities play as the engine of our economy at all times, and particularly today, as in many parts of the country we are looking to restart the economy. That is why the Prime Minister announced just this morning that we will be accelerating payments under the gas tax fund. Municipalities will receive the full amount of their 2020-21 payment on June 10. This will help them with some of their near-term liquidity issues.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We're now going to Mr. Manly, the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Mr. Manly, go ahead.

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program is not helping enough small businesses. Many landlords do not want to take part in the program. Small businesses are requesting that they be able to apply without the landlord's participation. Many small businesses do not meet the 70% income-loss threshold. Many did their best to keep employees engaged and tried hard to not lose clients, as the government urged them to do. They are, in fact, being penalized for that effort. Thousands of business owners across

the country will not be able to pay their rent today and risk closing permanently.

Will the government push the provinces to include an eviction moratorium during the pandemic and make this commercial rent assistance program more flexible to ensure small businesses can survive?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question, which recognizes the very serious challenge that many small businesses are facing during the course of this pandemic.

We know that the programs we've put forward, programs like the emergency business account, are supporting businesses, but the emergency rent approach, on which we've worked together with provinces, can also help significantly. We are seeing a significant number of landlords and tenants coming forward with this and taking this up. I would encourage landlords to use this program, which is supporting them.

Of course, the suggestion from the member that provinces take action in restricting evictions is one that I've been speaking about to ministers of finance from the provinces over the course of the last couple of months. This is an area of provincial jurisdiction. We are supportive and working hard to make sure this program works.

• (1350)

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Chair, this week marks the 31st anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and we are currently seeing repression of the democracy movement in Hong Kong. We know that Communist China oppresses minority groups and does not respect human rights.

In spite of this knowledge, the Harper Conservative government signed a lopsided and anti-democratic investment treaty with China in 2012, the Canada-China FIPA. This Conservative deal gave Chinese state-owned corporations extraordinary powers to challenge our democratic decisions through a secretive private tribunal system.

In the years since the FIPA was signed, with no vote in Parliament, Chinese state-owned corporations have been purchasing Canadian assets and resources. These corporations can seek financial compensation from Canadian taxpayers for the loss of potential profit when our laws and policies get in the way of their profit-taking.

Can the government tell us whether any of these Chinese corporations has threatened to use the anti-democratic investor-state provisions of the FIPA to seek financial compensation from Canadian taxpayers?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** As I'm sure the member will know, Canada is setting up with its allies around the world to protect the freedom and democracy that has been enjoyed by the people in Hong Kong. As he knows, we have issued a declaration with a number of allies we have called upon to make sure that measures remain in place to protect the freedom and liberty of the people of Hong Kong.

We know that the one country, two systems treaty system has provided the framework under which the people of Hong Kong have been able to create an economy that is resilient and has made Hong Kong a place where people want to do business, commerce and trade.

Mr. Chair, we have expressed our deep concern. I would refer the member to the joint statement we have issued with the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. We have spoken with one voice and we have said we have deep concerns that the actions by Beijing, if they were to proceed with this national security law unilaterally, would undermine the bedrock of what has made Hong Kong, and that we will review the impact that—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Manly, you have about 45 seconds left. Go ahead; there's time for a short question.

**Mr. Paul Manly:** That was a trick question, because this anti-democratic agreement states that we wouldn't be able to have permission to disclose that information if there was, in fact, an investor-state dispute.

Unlike NAFTA, which had a six-month period for renegotiation, the Harper Conservatives locked us into a 15-year agreement with the FIPA and this anti-democratic agreement. Will the government re-engage the special committee on Canada-China relations so we can do a thorough investigation of this Conservative sellout of Canadian democracy—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We are out of time, Mr. Manly. We'll go to the minister for a response.

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canada will always pursue trade in the interest of Canadians, and we are in the process of reviewing our FIPA agreements so those agreements can provide the right framework for Canadians to trade, with the interests of Canadians always top of mind.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We're now going to Ms. Ashton in Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Ms. Ashton, go ahead with your question.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with the member for Victoria.

My question is to the Minister of Fisheries. This pandemic has hit Canadians hard. Import markets for our fish have dried up. This is devastating for inland fisheries. The season opened last week, and fishers are desperate for support. For indigenous fishers, fishing sustains their communities. It is their way of life.

Will the government work with the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation and inland fishers to develop and facilitate the delivery of an emergency package that works for them and find ways to redirect product to domestic markets, including communities facing food insecurity now?

• (1355)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Mr. Chair, we've recognized how hard the pandemic has hit our fishers and our fishing sector. We've made available a number of different measures. One of the things we're doing primarily is the harvesters' benefit, which allows all harvesters to take advantage of a benefit as well as a grant contribution to help them get through. We're also changing EI so they can now qualify for their EI benefits based on previous seasons, not this one, recognizing they're going to face challenges this year.

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Board is a Crown corporation. We know it's been a very difficult time for them. We are continuing to look at ways we can address the challenges within the industry and we'll continue to work with them to make sure we are addressing those needs.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Ms. Ashton, we have about one minute left. There's time for a short question. Go ahead.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** My question is to the Minister of Transport.

Canadians are being ripped off by airlines that are refusing to give passengers their money back. Airlines are profiting off Canadians during a very desperate time. This government has sat by while the Canadian Transportation Agency issued a statement to back up the airlines' appalling actions. What is this government doing to fix this? Why aren't they ensuring that public funds involve reimbursing passengers and an equity stake for Canadians?

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** Mr. Chair, I certainly recognize the very difficult situation and the frustration of Canadians who would have preferred a refund. At the same time, at this point if airlines were required to immediately reimburse all the cancelled tickets, it would have a devastating effect on the airlines. That is why the Canadian Transportation Agency, which is an independent body, recommended that vouchers be issued and that they have a reasonable time to be used—two years.

It is also very important to bear in mind that as we begin to exit this pandemic, we must still have an airline industry in this country.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Now we're going to the honourable member for Victoria, Ms. Collins.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Chair, in Victoria housing and homelessness were at a crisis point long before the pandemic hit, but now people are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. If you don't have a place to live, you don't have the luxury of following public health advice and staying home. As part of the recovery, will this government be increasing funding to build or buy the housing needed to address homelessness?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, very early in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our government provided \$157.5 million directly to 51 community entities to respond directly to the needs of homeless Canadians. We also provided \$50 million in additional money to women's shelters. We are continuing with the national housing strategy. We are providing supports to communities and NGOs, as well as municipalities that are moving projects forward.

**Ms. Laurel Collins:** Mr. Chair, the federal government allocated just \$1.3 million in Reaching Home funds to my region. While the province has stepped up, it cost them \$18.5 million to purchase just one hotel in Victoria. The federal funding is clearly inadequate. Is the government going to show some leadership and at least match the provincial funds?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, we moved very quickly. The \$157.5 million, I must note, was additional money on top of the base funding that we provide every year to address the needs of Canada's most vulnerable. In addition to that, our projects under the national housing strategy are continuing. We are providing leadership. We are trusting the community entities to make the decisions on where the funding goes and to respond in a way that meets the—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Ms. Collins, you have about 40 seconds left, which is time for a short question. Go ahead.

**Ms. Laurel Collins:** The minister mentioned the national housing strategy. This government's national housing strategy reduces the level of targeted funding for lower-income households, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. My question is simple: Coming out of the pandemic in the coming months, is the government going to increase housing funding to address the immediate need, yes or no?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Chair, I disagree with the honourable member. Our money is targeted to communities. They have community advisory boards that decide how to spend the money. If the NDP does not trust local communities to make decisions, they should say so.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I now invite the hon. member for Joliette, Mr. Ste-Marie, to take the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Ste-Marie.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, the last time I checked, we still had a democratic system and the government had to remain accountable.

The government needs to present a picture of the economic situation and a picture of its overall emergency measures. Does the government intend to extend the measures over the summer? If so, how will it do so? The government must also present its working scenar-

ios for the economic recovery. The government needs to be transparent.

When will the government provide its economic update?

• (1400)

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his questions.

I agree, it is very important to be transparent and to provide the necessary information to Canadians.

Every day, we announce measures, of course, but also the cost of the measures and the amount of the investments. It is very important. The challenge at the moment is the economic situation, which is very fluid. When the situation is more stable, we will have the opportunity to give an economic update.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** In my opinion, Mr. Chair, it will really be too late to do the economic update when things are more stable.

We have been asking for an economic update for the past month. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been urging the government to table an economic update in a timely manner. With only three weeks left in the House before the summer, the clock is ticking.

The Quebec government will table its economic update later this month. Will the federal government follow suit?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, let me confirm that we will continue to be transparent about the investments; it is very important.

Of course, each day we work to make sure we have a solid grasp of the economic situation. As I said, when the situation is a little more stable, we will have the opportunity to explain our situation with an economic update.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Once again, Mr. Chair, when the situation is more stable, it will be too late to do an economic update; instead we will have to table a budget with the recovery in mind.

Speaking of the recovery, the Parliamentary Budget Officer is surprised that the government is calling on the private sector for ideas for its recovery plan. Mr. Giroux points out that this government has thousands of public servants with very good ideas, and he adds that the government can also ask for the opposition parties' views. That would be a very good idea.

Why is the government contracting out the development of its recovery plan to the private sector?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, I would like to tell the hon. member that it is important to listen to what we are trying to do, and to listen to people's ideas and opinions, not only in Parliament, but also from our society.



So we keep listening. Of course, with our approach, we will address the economic recovery in a way that will ensure we can maintain our very strong position.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Mr. Chair, we are still surprised that the government has contracted out its recovery plan to the private sector.

The sooner the government tables its recovery plan, the better. Businesses and individuals would start gaining confidence in the economy again. It would help them to loosen the purse strings and be assured that there will be economic life after the pandemic. Again, that is what the Parliamentary Budget Officer says.

Can the government tell us when it will table its recovery plan?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** Mr. Chair, we feel it is very important to consider what we need to do in each phase of our recovery.

At this time, it is necessary to consider the public health situation and the gradual reopening of our economy. That is why we feel our approach aims for a safe recovery. Obviously, by gathering more information in Phase 3, we will be able to consider more than one approach to recovery.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Ste-Marie, you have about 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

I understand that the exact date for tabling the recovery plan may be difficult to determine at this time.

Can the minister tell us whether he currently intends to table the recovery plan in a month ending in “ber”? If not, will it be before or after that?

**Hon. Bill Morneau:** We continue to work with the provinces on an approach to determine the timing of the recovery, and we are also listening to our colleagues in Parliament, of course.

• (1405)

[*English*]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We're now going to the honourable member for Abbotsford, Mr. Fast.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Prime Minister continues to pander to the Communist regime in China. We were shocked to hear that his own Minister of Digital Government used WeChat, a Chinese social media site, to raise funds to sue a Global News reporter—for what? It was for daring to expose China's attempt to hoard PPE during the COVID crisis.

Is it the practice of the government to support lawsuits against Canadian reporters who challenge the hostile actions of the regime in China, and will the Prime Minister now condemn the actions of the digital government minister?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Mr. Chair, we value the important work of media across the country and the world. Attacking the integrity of hard-working journalists is not acceptable.

As many members on all sides of the House know, WeChat is a social media platform used to engage and share information with the Chinese-Canadian community. Participation in this group, much

like Facebook, is guided by posted guidelines and a disclaimer. In this case, the individual who violated the guidelines of the group is no longer a part of that group.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Mr. Chair, Canadians have no reason to trust the Prime Minister on anything to do with China, especially when it comes to trade policy. Two and a half years ago, the Prime Minister travelled to China to commence free trade negotiations, and the talks ended up in complete failure and embarrassment. Still the Prime Minister continues to cozy up to the Chinese regime, refusing to ban Huawei from our 5G network or to speak out convincingly against China's oppression in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the two Michaels are continuing to languish in Chinese jails. This is the kind of partner the Prime Minister wants to negotiate a trade agreement with.

Can the minister tell us whether at any time during the last six months the Prime Minister or anyone else in his government has had discussions with China about a free trade agreement? A simple yes or no will do.

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Chair, as you know, Canada has a complex and multi-dimensional relationship with China. Canada will continue to engage with China with eyes wide open. Any work that we do on trade and on all matters will always be in the interests of Canadians first.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** I think Canadians will see that the minister didn't even answer a simple yes-or-no question, so I'll ask her a simpler yes-or-no question. Is she or anyone else in her government presently discussing or negotiating a free trade agreement with China, yes or no?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Chair, we will always do our work, including any discussions on trade and indeed all of our work, with the interests of Canadians and Canadian businesses as our absolute top priority.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Again, there was no answer, so I'll try again. Will the minister now assure Canadians that she and the Prime Minister's government will not negotiate a free trade agreement with China, yes or no?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Any work that we do will always be guided by the best interests of Canadians and Canadian businesses.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Mr. Chair, I am just flabbergasted. This minister has been asked three times if the government is negotiating a trade agreement. She refuses to answer, so I'll try again.

Will the minister tell us why she thinks negotiating a trade agreement with a hostile country like China is in Canada's best interests?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Chair, I thank the honourable member for the question. The answer is no.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Mr. Chair, I just want to make sure.

Free trade is a good thing when it takes place between like-minded countries that embrace free market principles and apply the rule of law. China is not such a country.

In fact, China repeatedly flouts international trade rules, illegally dumps underpriced goods into Canada, and prevents Canadian canola, beef and pork from entering China. It has also jailed Canadians without due process.

Will the minister now assure us that our government will not negotiate any free trade agreements with China, yes or no?

• (1410)

**Hon. Mary Ng:** We are not in discussions with China on a free trade agreement, and as my colleagues, including the Prime Minister and the foreign minister, have said many times in this House and outside of this House, our priority continues to be the immediate release of Canadians detained in China.

We will always work in the interests of Canadians and Canadian businesses. That is what we will always do.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** This will conclude today's sitting of the special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore this committee stands adjourned until tomorrow at noon.

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